

Little Women

Coloring Book



Louisa May Alcott



LITTLE WOMEN

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Louisa May Alcott

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"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo.

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"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy.

"We've got Father and Mother and one another," said Beth.

The four young faces brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, "We haven't got Father and shall not have him for a long time." Each thought of Father far away down South, where the fighting with the rebels was.

Then Meg said, "You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure when our men are suffering so in the army."

"I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy a new novel for myself," said Jo, who was a bookworm.

"I planned to spend mine on new music," said Beth.

"I shall get a nice box of drawing pencils; I really need them," said Amy.

"Mother didn't say anything about our money, and she won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want and have a little fun. I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it," cried Jo.

"I know I do—teaching those tiresome King children nearly all day when I am longing to enjoy myself at home," said Meg.

"You don't have half such a hard time as I do," said Jo. "How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady who is never satisfied?"

When Mr. March lost his property in trying to help an unfortunate friend, the two older girls begged to be allowed to do something toward their own support, at least, and their parents consented. Meg found a place as a nursery governess. Jo happened to suit Aunt March, who was lame and needed an active person to wait upon her.

The four sisters sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly outside, and the fire crackled cheerfully inside.

Margaret, or Meg, the eldest of the four, was sixteen and very pretty. Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall and thin, and she never seemed to know what to do with her long arms and legs. Her long, dark hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled in a net to keep it out of her way. Elizabeth, or Beth, as everyone called her, was a bright-eyed girl of thirteen with a shy manner and a peaceful expression. She loved music dearly and practiced away patiently at the jingling old piano. Amy, the youngest, was a regular snow maiden, with blue eyes, yellow hair, and a talent for drawing.

The clock struck six, and having swept up the hearth, Beth put a pair of their mother's slippers down to warm.

"They are quite worn out. Marmee must have a new pair," said Jo.

"I thought I'd get her some with my dollar," said Beth.

"No, I shall!" cried Amy.

"I'm the oldest," began Meg, but Jo cut in with a decided—

"I shall provide the slippers, for Father told me to take special care of Mother while he was gone."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Beth, "let's each get her something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves."

Everyone thought this a splendid idea, and the girls were quite merry when they returned to their knitting.

"Glad to find you all together, my girls," said a cheery voice at the door, and the sisters turned to welcome a tall, motherly lady. She was not elegantly dressed, but the girls thought her the most splendid mother in the world.

"Well, dearies, how have you got on today? There was so much to do, getting the boxes ready to go tomorrow, that I didn't come home till now. Has



The four sisters sat knitting away in the twilight.



Jo cried out, "A letter! a letter! Three cheers for Father!"

anyone come calling, Beth? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death. Come and kiss me, baby."

While asking these questions, Mrs. March got her wet clothes off, her warm slippers on, and, sitting down in the easy chair, drew Amy to her lap, preparing to enjoy the happiest hour of her busy day.

"I've got a treat for you after supper," said Mrs. March.

Jo cried out, "A letter! a letter! Three cheers for Father!"

"Yes, a nice long letter. He is well and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas and a special message to you girls," said Mrs. March.

"When will he come home, Marmee?" asked Beth.

"Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work as long as he can, and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter."

They all drew to the fire, Mother in the big chair, with Beth at her feet, Meg and Amy perched on either arm of the chair, and Jo leaning on the back. Father said little of the hardships he suffered; it was a cheerful, hopeful letter, full of lively descriptions of camp life, marches, and war news; and only at the end did his heart overflow with love:

Give them all my dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them during the day and pray for them at night. A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but remind them that while we wait, we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty, will correct their faults, and that when I come back to them, I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women."

Everybody sniffed when they came to that part. Amy hid her face on her mother's shoulder and sobbed out, "I am a selfish girl! But I'll truly try to be better, so he won't be disappointed in me."

"We all will!" cried Meg. "I think too much of my looks and hate to work, but won't any more, if I can help it."

"I'll try and be what he loves to call me, a little woman, and not be rough and wild. I'll do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else," said Jo.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing her duty.

Jo was the first to wake on Christmas morning. The winter sunshine crept in to touch the bright heads and faces with a Christmas greeting.

"Where is Mother?" asked Meg, as she and Jo ran downstairs.

"Goodness only knows. Some poor creature come a-beggin', and your ma went straight off to see what was needed. There never was such a woman for givin' away vittles and drink, clothes and firewood," replied Hannah, who had lived with the family since Meg was born and was considered by them all more as a friend than a servant.

"There's Mother. Quick!" cried Jo, as a door banged, and the girls rushed to the table, eager for breakfast.

"Merry Christmas, Marmee!" they cried, in chorus.

"Merry Christmas, little daughters! But I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies poor Mrs. Hummel with her little newborn baby. Her six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there, and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?"

They were all unusually hungry, and for a minute or two no one spoke.

Then Jo exclaimed, "I'm so glad you came before we began!"

"May I go and help carry the things to the poor little children?" asked Beth.

"I shall take the cream and the muffins," added Amy, giving up the food she most liked.

Meg was already covering the buckwheats and piling the bread into one big plate.

"I thought you'd do it," said Mrs. March, smiling. "You shall all go and help me, and when we come back we will have bread and milk for breakfast, and make it up at dinnertime."



They were soon ready, and they set out through back streets, arriving to find a poor, bare, miserable room with broken windows, no fire, ragged blankets, a sick mother, crying baby, and a group of hungry children cuddled under one old quilt, trying to keep warm.

How the big eyes stared and lips smiled as the girls went in!

“Oh, my God, it is good angels come to us!” said the poor woman, crying for joy.

That was a very happy breakfast, though the girls didn’t get any of it, and when they all went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not four merrier people than the hungry little girls who had given away their breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning.

That evening the girls gave a Christmas play for their friends, after which they were all invited by Mrs. March to come down to supper.

This supper was a surprise, even to the actors, and, when they saw the table, they looked at one another in amazement. There was ice cream—actually two dishes of it, pink and white—and cake and fruit and bonbons and, in the middle of the table, four great bouquets of hothouse flowers.

“It’s Santa Claus,” said Beth.

“Old Mr. Laurence sent it,” replied Mrs. March.

“The Laurence boy’s grandfather! What in the world put such a thing into his head? We don’t know him!” exclaimed Meg.

“Hannah told one of his servants about your breakfast party. He is an odd old gentleman, but that pleased him. He knew my father, years ago, and he sent me a note this afternoon, saying he hoped I would allow him to express his friendly feeling toward my children by sending them a few trifles in honor of the day. I could not refuse, and so you have a little feast at night to make up for the bread-and-milk breakfast.”

“That boy put it into his head, I know he did! He’s a capital fellow, and I wish we could get acquainted, but he’s bashful,” said Jo.

“You mean the people who live in the big house next door, don’t you?” asked one of Meg’s friends. “My mother knows old Mr. Laurence but says he keeps his grandson shut up, when he isn’t riding or walking with his tutor, and makes him study very hard. Mother says he’s almost sixteen and very nice, though he never speaks to us girls.”

“Our cat ran away once, and he brought her back, and we talked over the fence and were getting on capitally when he saw Meg coming and walked off. I mean to know him some day, for he needs fun, I’m sure he does,” said Jo.

A brief introduction to Laurie (as young Theodore Laurence was called) at a New Year’s Eve dance the following week made Jo more eager than ever to know him; she had been intrigued by his stories of living abroad and was put at ease by his good humor. When a snowy afternoon came, she decided to see what could be done. She saw Mr. Laurence drive off and then went out to dig her way through the snow down to the hedge, where she paused and looked over. All quiet—curtains down at the lower windows, servants out of sight, and nothing human visible but a curly black head leaning on a thin hand at the upper window.



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Jo called out, "How do you do? Are you sick?"

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Laurie opened the window and croaked out, "Better, thank you. I've had a bad cold and been shut up a week."

"I'm sorry. What do you amuse yourself with?"

"Nothing. It's as dull as tombs up here."

"Don't you read?"

"Not much. They won't let me."

"Isn't there some nice girl who'd read and amuse you? Girls are quiet and like to play nurse."

"Don't know any."

"You know us," said Jo.

"So I do! Will you come, please?" cried Laurie.

"I'll come, if Mother will let me. I'll go ask her. Shut that window, like a good boy, and wait till I come."

With that, Jo marched into her house. A few minutes later, Laurie heard someone being shown to the door of his little parlor. Jo appeared, looking rosy and kind, with a covered dish in one hand and Beth's three kittens in the other.

"Here I am, bag and baggage," she said. "Mother sent her love, and was glad if I could do anything for you. Meg wanted me to bring some of her sweet pudding, and Beth thought her cats would be comforting."

"How kind you are! Now please take the big chair, and let me do something to amuse you," said Laurie.

"No. I came to amuse you. Shall I read aloud?" and Jo looked longingly toward some books nearby.

"Thank you. I've read all those, and if you don't mind I'd rather talk," answered Laurie.

"I'll talk all day if you'll only set me going. Beth says I never know when to stop."

"Is Beth the rosy one who stays at home a good deal and sometimes goes out with a little basket?" asked Laurie.

"Yes, that's Beth."

"The pretty one is Meg, and the curly-haired one is Amy, I believe?"

"How did you find that out?"

Laurie answered, "Why, you see, I often hear you calling to one another, and when I'm alone up here, I can't help looking over at your house—you always seem to be having such good times."

"You may look as much as you like," said Jo. "I just wish, though, instead of peeping, you'd come over and see us. Wouldn't your grandpa let you?"

"I think he would, if your mother asked him. He's very kind, though he does not look so, and he lets me do whatever I like, pretty much, only he's afraid I might be a bother to strangers," said Laurie.

"We are not strangers, we are neighbors, and you needn't think you'd be a bother. We want to know you, and I've been trying to do so for such a long time."

To amuse the boy, Jo told him about her work with Aunt March, and gave him a lively description of the fidgety old lady, her fat poodle, her parrot that spoke Spanish, and the library she loved. She told all about her sisters and herself, of their plays and plans, their hopes and fears for Father, and the most interesting events of the little world in which the sisters lived. Then they got to talking about books, and to Jo's delight, she found that Laurie loved them as well as she did and had read even more than she had.

"If you like them so much, come down and see ours. Grandpa is out, so you needn't be afraid," said Laurie.

Laurie led the way from room to room, and at last they came to the library. It was lined with books, and there were pictures and statues and little cabinets full of coins and curiosities, and chairs and strange tables, and, best of all, a great open fireplace.

"What richness!" sighed Jo, sinking into a chair, and gazing about her.

Before he could reply, a bell rang, and a maid came in and said, "The doctor to see you, sir."

"Would you mind if I left you for a minute?" said Laurie to Jo.

"Don't mind me. I'm as happy as a cricket here," answered Jo.

Laurie went away, and his guest amused herself in her own way. She was standing before a fine portrait of Laurie's grandfather when the door opened



"Here I am, bag and baggage," she said.

again, and without turning, she said, "I'm sure now that I shouldn't be afraid of him, for he's got kind eyes, though his mouth is grim. He isn't as handsome as my grandfather, but I like him."

"Thank you, ma'am," said a gruff voice behind her, and there, to her great dismay, stood old Mr. Laurence. "So you're not afraid of me, hey?"

"Not much, sir."

"And you don't think me as handsome as your grandfather?"

"Not quite, sir."

"But you like me, in spite of it?"

"Yes, I do, sir."

That answer pleased the old gentleman; he gave a short laugh, shook hands with her and said, "What have you been doing to this boy of mine, hey?"

"Only trying to be neighborly, sir. He seems a little lonely, and young folks would do him good, perhaps. We should be glad to help if we could, for we don't forget the splendid Christmas present you sent us," said Jo.

"Tut, tut, tut. Oh, there's the tea bell. Come down, and go on being neighborly."

The next day old Mr. Laurence came to visit the Marches and said something funny or kind to each one of the girls and talked over old times with their mother; and so nobody felt much afraid of him, except timid Beth.

The new friendship between Laurie and the Marches flourished like grass in spring. Everyone liked him, and he informed his tutor, Mr. Brooke, that "the Marches were regular splendid girls." And this roused Mr. Brooke's notice of just how sweet and beautiful the eldest sister, Meg, was. What good times Laurie and the girls had—such plays and sleigh rides and skating parties, such pleasant evenings in the Marches' old parlor, and now and then such fine little parties at the great house! Meg could walk into the conservatory whenever she liked; Jo browsed over the new library; and Amy copied pictures and enjoyed beauty to her heart's content.

Only Beth, though yearning to play Mr. Laurence's grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to the "Mansion of Bliss," as Meg called it. She went once with Jo, but the old gentleman's voice frightened her away, and she declared she would never go there anymore. Nothing could change her mind until Mr. Laurence, hearing of her fear, set about mending matters. During one of the brief calls he made on the Marches, he led the conversation to music and talked away, fascinating Beth. At the back of his chair, she stood listening, with her great eyes wide open and her cheeks red. Mr. Laurence talked on about Laurie's lessons and teachers, and then, as if the idea had just occurred to him, he said to Mrs. March, "The boy neglects his music now, and the piano suffers for want of use. Wouldn't some of your girls like to run over and practice on it now and then? They needn't see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time. For I'm shut up in my study at the other end of the house, Laurie is out a great deal, and the servants are never near the drawing room after nine o'clock. Please tell the young ladies what I say, and if they don't care to come, why, never mind."

Here he rose, as if going, and Beth made up her mind to speak.

"Oh, sir, they do care, very, very much." Beth slipped her hand into his and



"So you're not afraid of me, hey?"



Beth went in at the side door and made her way to the drawing room, where the piano stood.

looked up at him with gratitude. "I'll come if you are quite sure nobody will hear me—and be disturbed."

"Not a soul, my dear. Come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you."

"How kind you are, sir!"

Beth blushed under his gaze, but she was not frightened now, and gave the big hand a grateful squeeze because she had no words to thank him for the gift he had given her.

The old gentleman, stooping down, kissed her, saying, "I had a little granddaughter once, with eyes like yours. God bless you, my dear!"

The next day, having watched both the old and the young gentlemen leave their house, Beth went in at the side door and made her way to the drawing room, where the piano stood. With trembling fingers and frequent stops to listen and look about, Beth at last touched the great instrument and right away forgot her fear. The delight the music gave her was like the voice of a beloved friend.

After that, she slipped through the hedge nearly every day, and the great drawing room was haunted by a musical spirit that came and went unseen. She



"Look there! Look there!"

never knew that Mr. Laurence often opened his study door to hear the old songs he liked.

"Mother," she said one day, "I'm going to make Mr. Laurence a pair of slippers. He is so kind to me, I must thank him, and I don't know any other way. Can I do it?"

"Yes, dear. It will please him very much and would be a nice way of thanking him."

Beth was a nimble little needlewoman, and the slippers were finished soon. Then she wrote a very short, simple note and, with Laurie's help, got them left on the study table one morning before the old gentleman was up.

All that day passed, and a part of the next, before any answer arrived. On the afternoon of the second day, Beth went out to do an errand. As she came up the street, on her return, she saw four heads popping in and out of the parlor windows, and the moment they saw her, several joyful voices screamed:

"Here's a letter from the old gentleman! Come quick and read it!"

Beth hurried on in a flutter. At the door, her sisters seized and bore her to the parlor, all pointing and all saying at once, "Look there! Look there!" There stood a little upright piano, with a letter lying on the glossy lid, directed to

"Miss Elizabeth March."

"For me?" gasped Beth.

"Yes, all for you, my precious," said Jo. "Don't you think he's the dearest old man in the world?"

The letter read:

MISS MARCH:

I have had many pairs of slippers in my life, but I never had any that suited me so well as yours. I know you will allow the "old gentleman" to send you something which once belonged to the little granddaughter he lost. I am your grateful friend,

JAMES LAURENCE

"Laurie told me how fond Mr. Laurence used to be of the child who died," said Jo. "Just think, he's given you her piano."

"Try it, honey. Let's hear the sound of the baby pianny," said Hannah.

So Beth tried it, and everyone said it was the most remarkable piano ever heard.

"You'll have to go and thank him," said Jo, by way of a joke, for the idea of the shy child's really going never entered her head.

"Yes, I mean to. I guess I'll go now, before I get frightened thinking about it." And, to the amazement of the family, Beth walked down the garden, through the hedge, and to the Laurences' door.

She went and knocked at the study door; when a gruff voice called out, "Come in!" she did go in, right up to Mr. Laurence, and held out her hand, saying, "I came to thank you, sir, for—" But she didn't finish, for he looked so friendly that she forgot her speech, and, remembering that he had lost the little granddaughter he loved, she put both arms round his neck and kissed him.

The passing months brought the little women their share of joys and disappointments, of friendships and petty quarrels. Once, when spring was drawing near, Amy and Jo had a falling out, for the older sister had refused to take the younger to the theater, and Amy in revenge had burned the precious manuscript of Jo's stories. Jo was sure that she could never forgive her sister, and she went to bed angry that night, ignoring Amy's overtures of peace. She awoke the next day to find her world little improved.

"Everybody is so hateful, I'll ask Laurie to go skating. He will set me to rights," said Jo at last.

Amy heard the clash of skates and exclaimed, "There! she promised I should go next time, for this is the last ice we shall have. But it's no use to ask such a cross girl to take me."

"Don't say that. You were very naughty, and it is hard to forgive the loss of her book. But I think she might do it now, if you ask her at the right minute," said Meg.

"I'll try," said Amy, and she ran after the friends.

Jo saw her coming and turned her back. Laurie did not see, for he was skating and sounding the ice. As he turned the bend, he shouted back, "Keep near the shore. It isn't safe in the middle."



*"I know you will allow the old gentleman to send you something
which once belonged to the little granddaughter he lost."*



"Bring a rail. Quick, quick!"

Jo heard, but Amy was struggling to put on her skates and did not catch a word. Jo glanced over her shoulder and thought, "No matter whether she heard or not, let her take care of herself."

Laurie had vanished around the bend, and Amy, far behind, was striking out toward the ice in the middle of the river. For a minute Jo stood still; then she resolved to go on, but something turned her round, just in time to see Amy go down with a sudden crash of rotten ice. She tried to call Laurie, but her voice was gone; she tried to rush forward, but her feet seemed to have no strength in them. Something rushed by her, and Laurie's voice cried out, "Bring a rail. Quick, quick!"

For the next few minutes she worked as if possessed, blindly obeying Laurie, who held Amy up till Jo dragged a rail from the fence. Together they got the child out; she was more frightened than hurt.

Shivering, dripping, and crying, Amy was brought home, and she fell asleep before a hot fire. When Amy was asleep, Mrs. March called Jo to her.

"Are you sure she's safe?" whispered Jo.

"Quite sure, dear," replied her mother cheerfully.

"Mother, if she should die, it would be my fault. It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it, and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, Mother, what shall I do?"

"Remember this day, and resolve with all your soul that you will never know another like it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it."



"I shall go at once, but it may be too late. Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!"

the sharpest reproof. Comforted by the sympathy given her, she looked up with an expression her face had never shown before and said, "I wouldn't forgive her, and today, if it hadn't been for Laurie, it might have been too late! How could I be so wicked?"

As if she heard, Amy opened her eyes, and held out her arms. Neither said a word, but they hugged one another close, and everything was forgiven and forgotten.

The ice and snows of winter soon changed to the greenery of spring, and summer followed fast with its games and sport; both seasons passed without Mr. March's homecoming. Summer at last gave way to fall, and still the war raged on, and Mr. March did not return. Finally, one November afternoon, there was a ring at the door, and a minute later, Hannah came in to Mrs. March with a letter.

"It's one of them horrid telegraph things," she said, handing it over.

At the word "telegraph" Mrs. March snatched it, read the two lines it contained, and dropped back into her chair.

MRS. MARCH:

Your husband is very ill. Come at once.

S. HALE,

Blank Hospital, Washington

Mrs. March read the message over and stretched out her arms to her daughters, saying, in a tone they never forgot, "I shall go at once, but it may be too late. Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!"

For several minutes there was nothing but the sound of sobbing in the room, mingled with words of comfort and hopeful whispers.

"The Lord keep the dear man!" said Hannah, as she wiped her face on her apron. "I won't waste no time a cryin', but git your things ready right away, mum."

"She's right," said Mrs. March, "there's no time for tears now. Where's Laurie?"

"Here, ma'am. Oh, let me do something!" cried the boy, hurrying from the next room.

"Send a telegram saying I will come at once. The next train goes early in the morning. I'll take that."

And off Laurie went.

"Jo, go and get these things. I'll write them down—they'll be needed, and I must go prepared for nursing. Beth, go and ask Mr. Laurence for a couple of bottles of old wine—I'm not too proud to beg for Father. He shall have the best of everything. Amy, tell Hannah to get down the black trunk, and Meg, come and help me find my things."

Mr. Laurence came hurrying back with Beth, and there was nothing he didn't offer, even himself as an escort to Mrs. March. But she would not hear of the old gentleman's undertaking the long journey. He left, saying he would be back soon.

In a short while, Meg discovered Mr. Brooke in the entry.

"I'm very sorry to hear of this, Miss March," he said. "I came to offer myself as escort to your mother. Mr. Laurence has work for me in Washington, and it will give me real satisfaction to be of service to her there."

"How kind you are!" said Meg. "Mother will accept, I'm sure. And it will be such a relief to know that she has someone to take care of her. Thank you very, very much!"

The short afternoon wore away; all the other errands were done, but still Jo did not return home from her errands. They began to get anxious, but finally she came walking in with a very strange expression on her face, and she laid a roll of bills before her mother, saying, "That's my contribution towards making Father comfortable, and bringing him home!"

"My dear, where did you get it? Twenty-five dollars!"

"I didn't beg, borrow, or steal it. I earned it; I only sold what was my own."

As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet, and a general outcry arose, for all her long, thick hair was cut short.

"Your hair! Your beautiful hair!"

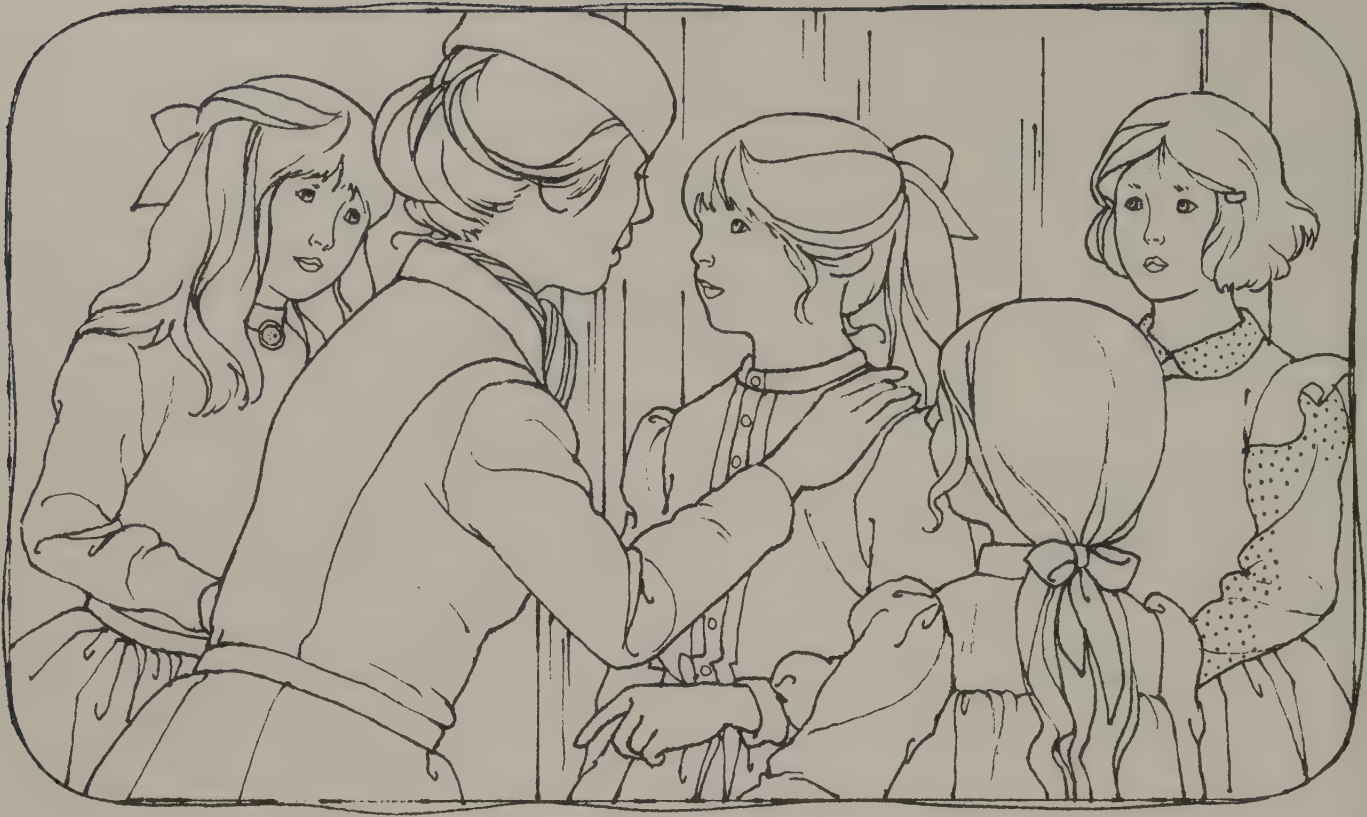
As everyone exclaimed, Jo said, rumpling up the brown hair left on her head, "My head feels light and cool. I'm satisfied, and the wigmaker I sold it to is satisfied. So please take the money, and let's have supper."

No one wanted to go to bed, when, at ten o'clock, Mrs. March put by the last finished job, and said, "Come, girls." Beth went to the piano and played her father's favorite hymn; all began bravely, but broke down one by one until Beth was left alone, singing with all her heart.

"Go to bed and don't talk, for we must be up early and shall need all the



"Your hair! Your beautiful hair!"



"Goodbye, my darlings," whispered Mrs. March.

sleep we can get. Good night, my darlings," said Mrs. March as the hymn ended.

In the cold gray dawn the sisters lit their lamp; as they dressed, they agreed to say good-bye cheerfully and send their mother on her journey unsaddened by tears. Nobody talked much, but as the time drew near and they sat waiting for the carriage, Mrs. March said to the girls, "Children, I leave you to Hannah's care and Mr. Laurence's protection. I have no fears for you. Go on with your work as usual, for work is a blessed comfort. Hope and keep busy."

"Yes, Mother."

"Good-bye, my darlings!" whispered Mrs. March, as she kissed one dear little face after the other and hurried into the carriage.

For a week the girls worked in a spirit of self-denial until, relieved of their first anxiety about their father, they relaxed their efforts a little. Beth alone kept on, with only slight relapses into idleness.

"Meg, I wish you'd go and see the Hummels. You know Mother told us not to forget them," she said, ten days after Mrs. March's departure.

"I'm too tired to go this afternoon," replied Meg, as she sewed.

"Can't you, Jo?" asked Beth.

"Too stormy for me with my cold."

"Why don't you go yourself?" asked Meg.

Beth quietly put on her hood, filled her basket with odds and ends for the poor children, and went out into the chilly air. It was late when she came back, and no one saw her creep upstairs and shut herself into her mother's room.



*"Oh Beth," cried Jo, hugging her close, with a frightened look,
"if you should be sick, I never could forgive myself!"*

Half an hour later, Jo went and found Beth sitting looking very sad, with red eyes, and a medicine bottle in her hand.

"What's the matter?" cried Jo.

Beth put out her hand as if to warn her off, and asked, "You've had the scarlet fever, haven't you?"

"Years ago, when Meg did. Why?"

"Mrs. Hummel's baby has it, and the doctor told me to go home and take medicine right away, or I'd have it as well."

"Oh, Beth," cried Jo, hugging her close, with a frightened look, "if you should be sick, I never could forgive myself!"

"Don't be frightened, I guess I shan't have it badly. I did take some medicine, and I feel better," said Beth.

"If only Mother was at home!" exclaimed Jo. "I'll call Hannah, she knows all about sickness."

"Don't let Amy come. She never had it, and I should hate to give it to her."

There was no need to worry, Hannah assured Jo; everyone had scarlet fever, and, if rightly treated, nobody died.

"Now I'll tell you what we'll do," said Hannah, when she had examined and questioned Beth. "We will have Dr. Bangs take a look at you, dear, and see that we start right. Then we'll send Amy off to Aunt March's for a spell, to keep her out of harm's way, and one of you girls can stay at home and amuse Beth for a day or two."

Beth did have a fever and was much sicker than anyone but Hannah and the

doctor suspected. Meg stayed home so that she would not infect the Kings, and kept house, feeling a little guilty when she wrote letters to her parents in which no mention was made of Beth's illness. Jo devoted herself to Beth day and night. The girl lay hour after hour, tossing to and fro, with meaningless words on her lips, or sank into a heavy sleep which gave her no peace. Dr. Bangs came twice a day, and Hannah sat up at night with her.

The first of December was a wintry day, for a bitter wind blew, and snow fell fast. When Dr. Bangs came that morning, he looked long at Beth, held her hot hand in both his own a minute, and laid it gently down, saying to Hannah, "If Mrs. March can leave her husband, she'd better be sent for."

Hannah nodded without speaking; Meg dropped down into a chair; Jo ran to the parlor and, throwing on her things, rushed out into the storm to send a telegram. She was soon back, and, while she was taking off her coat, Laurie came in, and she told him, "I've sent for Mother."

"Oh, Jo, it's not so bad as that?" cried Laurie.

"Yes, it is. She doesn't know us. She doesn't look like my Beth, and there's nobody to help us bear it with Mother and Father both gone."

As the tears streamed down poor Jo's cheeks, she stretched out her hand in a helpless sort of way, and Laurie took it in his, whispering, "I'm here. Hold on to me, Jo, dear!"

When Jo went back to Beth where she lay, she found her sister's face vacant, her once busy hands weak and wasted, her hair scattered rough and tangled on the pillow. All day she lay so, only rousing now and then to mutter, "Water." All day Jo and Meg hovered over her, watching, waiting, hoping, and trusting in God and Mother; and all day the snow fell, the bitter wind raged, and the hours dragged by.

When the clock struck twelve, Jo and Meg saw a change pass over Beth's pale face. The house was still, and nothing but the wailing of the wind broke the deep hush. Weary Hannah slept on, and no one but the sisters saw the shadow that seemed to fall upon the little bed. It was past two when Jo, who stood at the window, heard a movement by the bed and, turning quickly, saw Meg kneeling before her mother's easy chair with her face hidden. A fear passed coldly over Jo as she thought, "Beth is dead, and Meg is afraid to tell me."

The look of pain was gone, and the beloved little face looked so pale and peaceful, that Jo leaned over this dearest of her sisters and kissed the damp forehead and whispered, "Good-bye, my Beth. Good-bye!"

As if awakened by the stir, Hannah started out of her sleep, hurried to the bed, looked at Beth, felt her hands, listened at her lips, and then exclaimed under her breath, "The fever's turned, she's sleeping natural, her skin's damp, and she breathes easy. Praise be given!"

Jo and Meg crept into the dark hall and, sitting on the stairs, held each other close, rejoicing with hearts too full for words. When they came back to be kissed and cuddled by faithful Hannah, they found Beth lying as she used to do, with her cheek on her hand, and breathing quietly, as if just fallen asleep.

Never had the sun risen so beautifully as it did to the heavy eyes of Meg and Jo as they looked out in the early morning.



"If Mrs. March can leave her husband, she'd better be sent for."

"It looks like a fairy world," said Meg, smiling to herself.

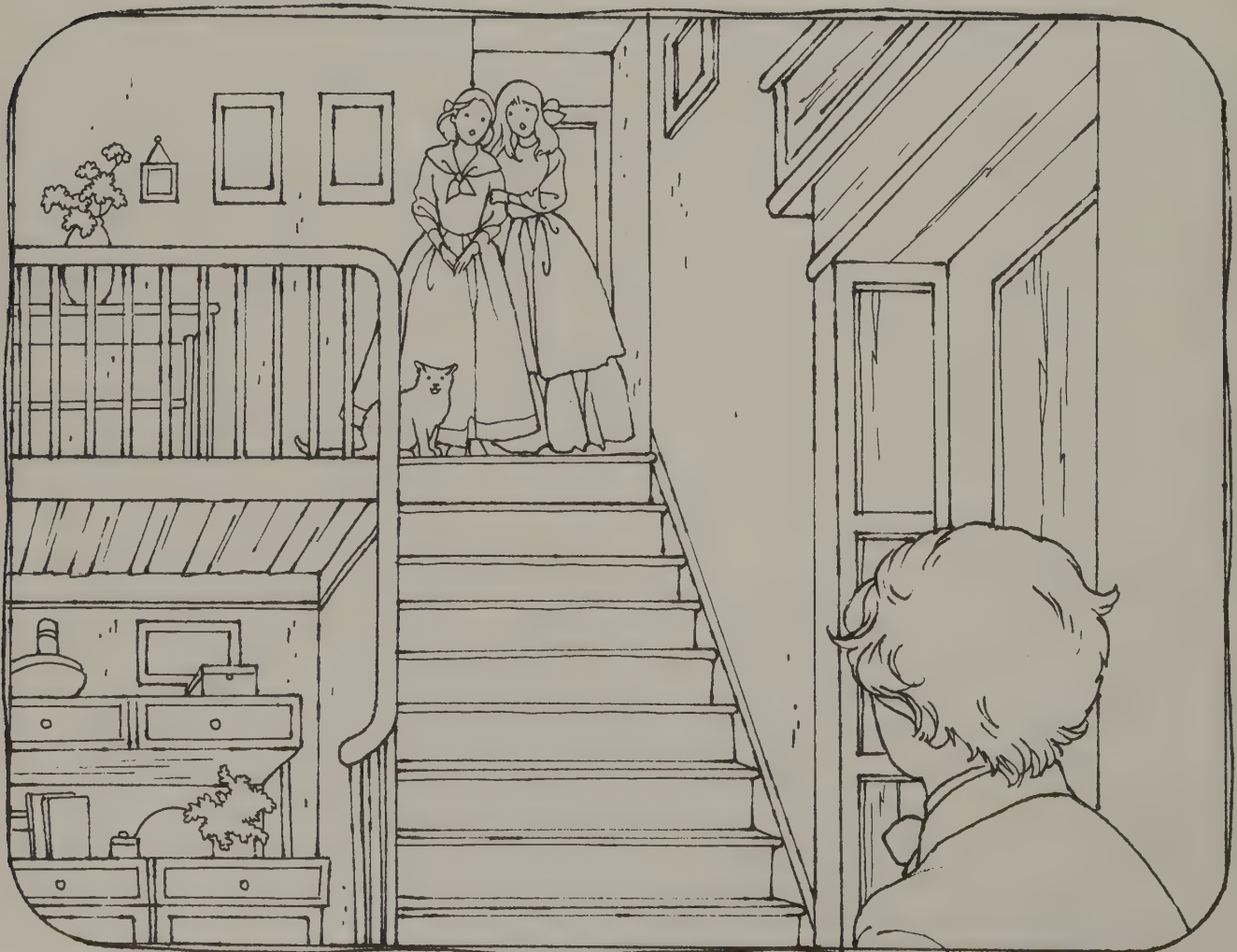
"Hark!" cried Jo.

Yes, there was a sound of bells at the door below, a cry from Hannah and then Laurie's voice saying in a joyful whisper, "Girls, she's come! She's come!"

When Beth woke from that long, healing sleep, the first thing she saw was Mother's face. Too weak to wonder, she only smiled and nestled close into the loving arms about her. Then she slept again, and the girls waited upon their mother, for she would not let go of the thin hand that clung to hers even in sleep.

Meg and Jo fed their mother while they listened to her whispered story of Father's state, Mr. Brooke's promise to stay and nurse him, the delays that the storm caused, and the comfort Laurie had given her when she arrived, worn out.

The peaceful weeks that followed were like sunshine after a storm. Beth and Mr. March improved rapidly, and he wrote of returning early in the new year. Beth was soon able to lie on the study sofa all day, amusing herself with the cats at first, and, in time, with dolls. Amy celebrated her return from Aunt March's by giving away as many of her treasures as she could get her sisters to accept.



Several days of unusually mild weather brought in a splendid Christmas Day. Beth felt especially well that morning.

"I'm so full of happiness that if Father were here, I couldn't hold one drop more," she said as Jo carried her off to the study to rest after the excitement of the gifts.

Half an hour after all had said they were so happy they could only hold one drop more, the drop came. Laurie opened the parlor door and popped his head in very quietly. He said, "Here's another Christmas present for the March family."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he was whisked away, and in his place appeared a tall man, muffled up to the ears, leaning on the arm of another tall man, Mr. Brooke. Father! Of course there was a general stampede, and for several minutes all of them seemed to lose their wits. Mr. March was in the embrace of four pairs of loving arms, Jo nearly fainted away, and Amy, having tumbled over a stool, hugged and cried over her father's boots. Mrs. March was the first to recover herself and held up her hand, "Hush! Remember Beth is resting!"

But it was too late; the study door flew open, and Beth ran straight into her father's arms.



There never was such a Christmas dinner as they had that day. Mr. Laurence and his grandson dined with them, also Mr. Brooke. At the head of the table, Beth and her father sat next to each other in two easy chairs. They drank toasts, told stories, sang songs, and had a thoroughly good time. After the guests departed, the happy family sat together round the fire.

"Just a year ago we were groaning over the dismal Christmas we expected to have. Do you remember?" asked Jo.

"Rather a pleasant year on the whole," said Meg.

"I think it's been a pretty hard one," observed Amy.

"I'm glad it's over, because we've got you back," whispered Beth, who sat on her father's knee.

"Rather a rough road for you to travel, my little women, especially the latter part of it. But you have got on bravely, and I think your burdens are bound to tumble off very soon," said Mr. March.

Like bees swarming after their queen, mother and daughters hovered about Mr. March the next day. But late in the afternoon the invalid retired to rest, and Meg was sewing alone with Jo when someone gave a tap at the parlor door.

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Brooke. "I came to see how your father finds himself today."

"He's well," said Jo. "I'll tell him you are here."

The instant she vanished from the room, Meg began to go toward the door, murmuring, "Mother will like to see you. Pray sit down, I'll call her."

"Don't go. Are you afraid of me, Margaret?"

She put out her hand and said, "How can I be afraid when you have been so kind to Father? I only wish I could thank you for it."

"Shall I tell you how?" asked Mr. Brooke, holding her hand in both his own and looking down at Meg with so much love in his brown eyes that her heart began to flutter.

"Oh no, please don't—I'd rather not," she said.

"I won't trouble you, I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg. I love you so much, dear," added Mr. Brooke tenderly.

Meg hung her head, and answered, "I don't know."

He pressed her hand, and said, "Will you try and find out? I want to know so much, for I can't go to work with any heart until I learn whether I am to have my reward in the end or not."

"I'm too young," said Meg.

"I'll wait, and in the meantime, you could be learning to like me."

Nobody ever knew exactly what went on in the parlor that afternoon, but a great deal of talking took place. Mr. Brooke continued to plead his suit with Meg until she at last consented to be his bride, while he agreed that the wedding would be put off for three years. After this he pleaded with Mr. and Mrs. March, told his plans, and persuaded her parents to accept the match.

At supper that evening, everyone except Jo looked very happy.

"In most families there comes, now and then, a year full of events," said Mrs. March. "This has been such a one, but it ends well after all."



*"I won't trouble you, I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg.
I love you so much, dear," added Mr. Brooke tenderly.*



"You can't know how hard it is for me to give up Meg. I've lost my dearest friend," sighed Jo.

Laurie and his grandfather came over after supper, delighted with the news of the tutor's engagement with sweet Meg. Noticing Jo's grim face, however, Laurie quietly asked her, "You don't look festive. What's the matter?"

"You can't know how hard it is for me to give up Meg. I've lost my dearest friend," sighed Jo.

"You've got me, anyhow. I'm not good for much, I know, but I'll stand by you, Jo, all the days of my life. Upon my word I will!"

"I know you will, and I'm ever so much obliged. You are always a great comfort to me," returned Jo.

"Well, now, don't be gloomy. Meg is happy, Brooke will get settled with money soon, Grandpa will help him, and it will be very jolly to see Meg in her own little house."

"There's no knowing what may happen in three years," said Jo.

"That's true. Don't you wish you could take a look forward and see where we shall all be then?"

"I think not, for I might see something sad, and everyone looks so happy now," said Jo, and her eyes went slowly round the room.

Father and Mother sat together, quietly remembering their own first days of romance some twenty years earlier. Amy was drawing a picture of the lovers, who sat apart in a beautiful world of their own. Beth lay on her sofa, talking cheerily with her old friend Mr. Laurence, who held her little hand. Jo lounged in her favorite low chair, with a serious, quiet look, and Laurie, leaning on the back of her chair, his chin on a level with her curly head, smiled and nodded at her in the long mirror that reflected them both.

Three years passed and brought few changes to the quiet family. The war was now over, and Mr. March was safely at home, busy with his books and the small parish which found in him a fine minister. Mrs. March was as brisk and cheery as, though rather grayer than, when we saw her last.

John Brooke went off to the war for a year, got wounded, was sent home and not allowed to return. He devoted himself to getting well, preparing for business, and earning a home for Meg.

Meg spent the time working as well as waiting, growing womanly, wise, and prettier than ever. Jo never went back to Aunt March, for the old lady took such a fancy to Amy that she bribed her with the offer of drawing lessons from one of the best teachers; for the sake of this, Amy accepted. Jo, meantime, devoted herself to writing, and Beth remained delicate long after the fever was a thing of the past. She was never again the rosy, healthy creature she had been.

And now let us speak of the "Dovecote." That was the name of the little brown house that Mr. Brooke had prepared for Meg's first home, with a little garden behind and a lawn about as big as a handkerchief in front.

"Are you satisfied? Does it seem like home, and do you feel as if you should be happy here?" asked Mrs. March, as she and her daughter went through the new kingdom, arm in arm.

"Yes, Mother, perfectly satisfied, thanks to you all." For her sisters and Laurie had just been helping her furnish and decorate it.

A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow with a short haircut came tramping down the road and walked over the low fence—it was Laurie. He and Jo soon went off for a stroll.

"I do object to being seen with a person who looks like a young prizefighter," Jo scolded him.

"This haircut helps me study," returned Laurie. "By the way, Jo, and to change the subject, I think that Parker, my college friend, is really getting desperate about Amy. He talks of her constantly."

"We don't want any more marrying in this family for years to come," said Jo. "Mercy on us, what are the children thinking of?" These "children" were far along in their teens.

"It's a fast age, and I don't know what we are coming to, ma'am," teased Laurie. "You are a mere baby, but you'll go next, Jo."

"Nobody will want me. I'll be the old maid in the family."

"You won't give anyone a chance," said Laurie. "You get so thorny no one dares touch or look at you."

"I don't like that sort of thing. Now don't say more about it; Meg's wedding has turned all our heads, and we talk of nothing but lovers and nonsense."

As they parted at the gate of the house, Laurie said, "Mark my words, Jo, you'll go next."

The June roses over the porch were awake bright and early on that next morning. Meg looked much like a rose herself, for all that was best and sweetest in heart and soul seemed to bloom into her face that day, making it fair and tender.



"Does it seem like home, and do you feel as if you should be happy here?" asked Mrs. March.

Her three younger sisters wore outfits of silver gray, with roses in their hair and on their chests, all the very image of fresh-faced, happy-hearted girls.

The wedding took place in the Marches' home, just as Meg wanted it. There was no bridal procession, but a sudden silence fell upon the room as Mr. March and the young couple took their places under a green arch they had fashioned for the occasion. Mother and sisters gathered close. Meg looked straight up into her husband's eyes and said, "I will!" with such trust in her voice that her mother's heart rejoiced and even Aunt March sniffed.

It was a little more than a year later that Meg had twins, a boy and a girl, the boy named John Laurence after his father and also his patron, the girl



Meg looked straight up into her husband's eyes and said, "I will!"



"Oh, take care of them for me, and if anything should happen to Beth—"

Margaret after mother and grandmother. They came to be known as Demi and Daisy.

Changes came to the lives of Meg's sisters as well. When Amy was seventeen, her Aunt Carrol offered to take her to Europe to see if she had the talents to become an artist. Amy of course accepted, and it was only on the steamer, just as the gangway was about to be withdrawn, that it suddenly came to her that a whole ocean was soon to roll between her and those who loved her best. She clung to Laurie, the last lingerer of her family's farewell party, saying with a sob, "Oh, take care of them for me, and if anything should happen to Beth—"

"I will, dear, I will, and if anything happens, I'll come and comfort you," whispered Laurie.

Jo, meanwhile, had plans of her own. She went to her mother one morning and told her, "I need stirring up, so, as you can spare my help this winter, I'd like to hop a little away and try my wings."

"Where will you hop?"

"To New York. I had a bright idea yesterday, and this is it. You know Mrs. Kirke wrote to you for some respectable young person to teach her children? I think I should suit her needs."

"What are your reasons for this sudden fancy?"

"I'm afraid Laurie is getting too fond of me."

"Then you don't care for him in the way it is evident he begins to care for you?"

"Mercy, no! I love the dear boy and am immensely proud of him, but as for anything more, it's out of the question."

The plan was talked over in a family council and agreed upon, for Mrs. Kirke gladly accepted Jo and promised to make a pleasant home for her.

From New York, Jo wrote volumes of letters to dear Beth and Marmee. We will skip over her many observations of New York and her successful writing



"Going home? Ah, you are happy that you haf a home to go in."

for newspapers and publishers, and instead quote a few lines of her first impressions of one of the several people living in Mrs. Kirke's boardinghouse:

This afternoon, while doing some needlework, I heard someone humming like a big bumblebee. I lifted the curtain to the parlor and saw there Professor Bhaer. While he arranged his books, I took a good look at him. A regular German—rather heavy, with brown hair tumbled all over his head, a bushy beard, the kindest eyes I ever saw, and a splendid big voice. His clothes were old, his hands were large, and he wasn't handsome at all but had beautiful teeth. The children love him. I watched as he let them play with him—not only Mrs. Kirke's children, but the ironing-woman's little girl.

As the weeks went on, she mentioned the dear Professor more and more often. In exchange for Jo's darning his socks, he began to give her German lessons.

Why everybody liked him was what puzzled Jo, at first. He was neither rich nor great, young nor handsome, and yet he was as attractive as a nice fire, and people seemed to gather about him as naturally as about a warm hearth. He was poor yet always appeared to be giving something away; a stranger, yet everyone was his friend; no longer young, but as happy-hearted as a boy; plain and peculiar, yet his face looked beautiful to many. Jo often watched him, trying to discover his charm, and at last decided that it was kindness that worked the miracle. She felt proud to know, through one of the boardinghouse's gossips, that Professor Bhaer was an honored professor in Berlin, though only a poor language teacher in America.

It was a pleasant winter and a long one, for Jo did not leave Mrs. Kirke till June. Everyone seemed sorry when the time came; the children were so sad, and Professor Bhaer's hair stuck straight up all over his head, for he always rumbled it wildly when disturbed.

"Going home? Ah, you are happy that you haf a home to go in," he said, when she told him.

"Yes, sir, but you'll come and see us, if you ever travel our way, won't you? I want my family to know my friend."

"Do you? Shall I come?" he asked.

"Yes."

That night, Professor Bhaer said to himself, "It is not for me, I must not hope it now." He had fallen in love with Jo but did not believe that she could ever have any love for him.

Jo returned home in time to attend Laurie's graduation ceremonies from college. The boy had graduated with honors and was understandably proud of himself; but Jo's pleasure was dampened by her fear of his feelings for her.

Her fears indeed proved justified, for as he and Jo took a walk one morning, Laurie said, "I've loved you ever since I've known you, Jo, I couldn't help it, you've been so good to me. I've tried to show it, but you wouldn't let me. Now I'm going to make you hear, and give me an answer, for I can't go on so any longer."

"I went away to keep you from doing this if I could."

"I thought so, but it was no use. I only loved you all the more, and I worked hard in college only to please you, and I gave up everything you didn't like, and waited, for I hoped you'd love me, though I'm not half good enough—"

"Yes, you are, you're a great deal too good for me, and I'm so grateful to you, and so proud and fond of you, I don't see why I can't love you as you want me to. I've tried, but I can't change the feeling. Oh, Laurie, I'm sorry, so desperately sorry! You'll see that I'm right, by and by, and thank me for it—"

"I'll be hanged if I do!" said Laurie.

"Yes, you will!" persisted Jo. "You'll get over this after a while and find some lovely girl who will adore you and make a fine wife for your fine house."

Laurie rushed away, suffering the biggest disappointment of his life.

Jo felt as if she had stabbed her dearest friend, and when he left her without a look behind him, she knew things would never be the same again.

When Jo came home that June, she had been struck with the change in Beth.



Laurie rushed away, suffering the biggest disappointment of his life.

No one spoke of it, but to Jo's eyes, sharpened by absence, it was very plain.

Laurie and his grandfather soon set off for Europe, on a trip designed to heal the young lover's wounds; Jo proposed to Beth a similar trip to the seashore, where she could live in the open air and let the fresh sea breezes blow a little color into her pale cheeks.

One day, as they were resting by the shore on the warm rocks, Beth saw that Jo had figured out the secret she had tried so hard to hide.

"Jo, dear, I'm glad you know it. I've tried to tell you, but I couldn't. I've known it for a good while, and now I'm used to it. Don't be troubled about me, because it's best. Indeed it is."

"On Beth, nineteen is too young. I can't let you go. I'll work and pray and fight against it. I'll keep you in spite of everything. There must be ways, it can't be too late. God won't be so cruel as to take you from me," cried Jo.

"I have a feeling that it was never intended I should live long. I'm not like the rest of you. I never made any plans about what I'd do when I grew up. I never thought of being married, as you all did. I never wanted to go away, and the hard part now is leaving you all. I'm not afraid, but it seems as if I should be homesick for you even in heaven."

Jo could not speak, and for several minutes there was no sound but the sigh of the wind and the lapping of the tide.

"Amy is coming in the spring," said Jo finally, "and I mean that you shall be ready to see and enjoy her. I'm going to have you well and rosy by that time."

"Jo, dear, don't hope any more. It won't do any good, I'm sure of that."

When they got home, Father and Mother saw plainly now what they had prayed to be saved from seeing. Tired with her short journey, Beth went at once to bed, saying how glad she was to be at home, and when Jo went downstairs to her parents, she found that she would be spared the hard task of telling Beth's secret. Her father stood leaning his head on the mantelpiece and did not turn as she came in; but her mother stretched out her arms as if for help, and Jo went to comfort her.



Her father stood leaning his head on the mantelpiece and did not turn as she came in; but her mother stretched out her arms as if for help, and Jo went to comfort her.



*Before the evening was half over, he had decided that
"little Amy" was going to make a very charming woman.*

At three o'clock in the afternoon, all the fashionable people of Nice, France, may be seen on the Promenade des Anglais—a charming place, for the wide walk, bordered with palms, flowers, and tropical shrubs, is bounded on one side by the sea, on the other by the grand drive, lined with hotels and villas, while beyond lie orange orchards and the hills.

Along this walk, on Christmas Day, a tall, handsome young man walked slowly, with his hands behind him.

"O Laurie, is it really you?" called out a young, blonde lady. "I thought you'd never come!"

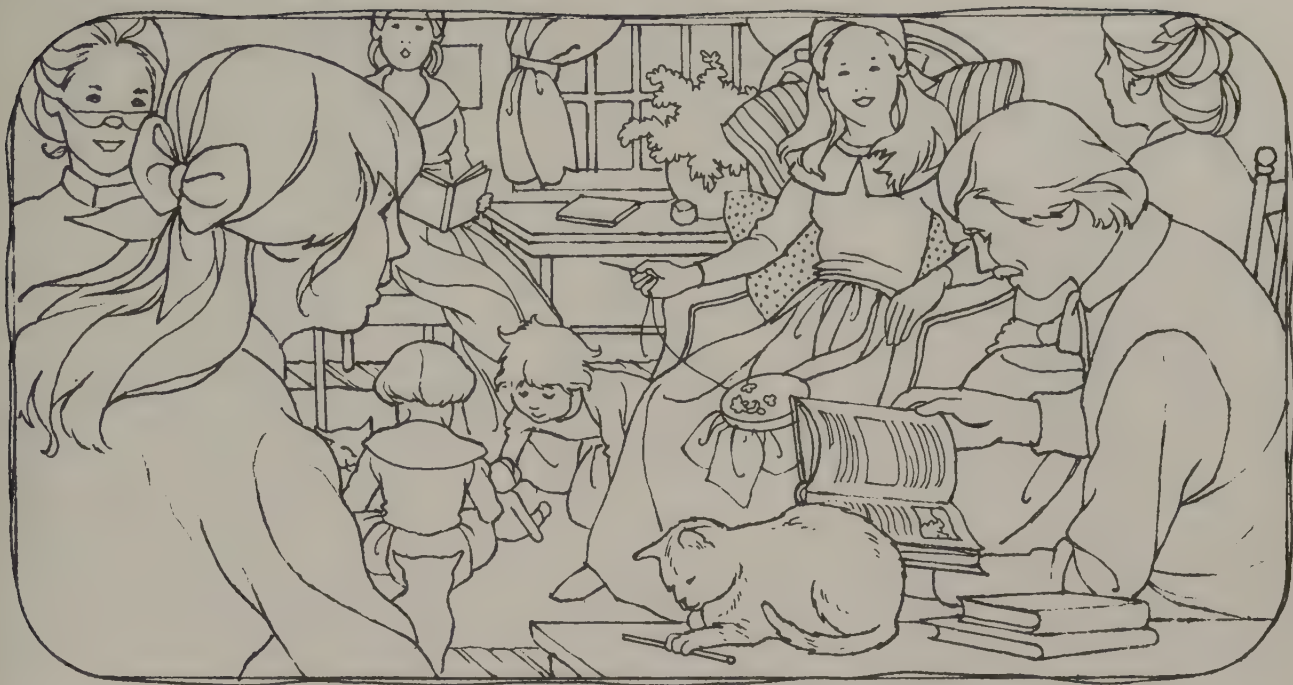
"I was detained on the way, Amy, but I promised to spend Christmas with you, and here I am."

He was happy to see a face that reminded him of what he so dearly missed. Indeed, he found Amy even more admirable than before. She was as lively and graceful as ever, with the addition of elegance. Always mature for her age, she had gained a composure that made her seem more of a woman. They spent some time feeding peacocks and then drove up and around the hills.

Amy said to herself, "I do want him to think I look well and to tell them so at home."

Truly Laurie thought her unusually attractive that night, when he accompanied her to a fancy ball. Before the evening was half over, he had decided that "little Amy" was going to make a very charming woman.

Amy did not know why he looked at her so kindly nor why he filled up her dance card with his own name and devoted himself to her for the rest of the evening in the most delightful manner, but the reason for this change between them was the result of the new impressions that both of them were giving and receiving.



The first few months were very happy ones, and Beth often used to look around and say, "How beautiful this is!"

Laurie went to Nice expecting to stay a week but instead remained a month. He and Amy took comfort in each other's company and were often together riding, walking, dancing, or dawdling. And when at last Laurie took his leave to return to his grandfather, Amy said to herself with an involuntary sigh, "Oh, but how I shall miss him!"

Let us leave Laurie and Amy for a moment and return to dear Beth, who was, so sadly, very sick and weak.

The pleasantest room in the house was set apart for her, and in it was gathered everything that she most loved—flowers, pictures, her piano, the little worktable, and the beloved cats. Father's best books found their way there, Mother's easy chair, Jo's desk, Amy's finest sketches; and every day Meg brought by her babies to make sunshine for Auntie Beth. John brought the fruit she loved; old Hannah never wearied of cooking nice little dishes to tempt her; and from across the sea came little gifts and cheerful letters from Amy and Laurie.

Cherished like a saint, Beth was as calm and busy as ever, for nothing could change her sweet, unselfish nature, and even while preparing to leave life, she tried to make it happier for those who remained behind. The feeble fingers were never idle as she knit little gifts for children and friends.

The first few months were very happy ones, and Beth often used to look around and say, "How beautiful this is!" as they all sat together in her sunny room, the babies kicking and crowing on the floor, mother and sisters working near, and father reading aloud in his pleasant voice.

It was good that this peaceful time was given them as preparation for the sad hours to come; for by and by Beth said the needle was "so heavy," and put it down forever; talking wearied her, faces troubled her, pain claimed her for its



She quietly drew her last breath, with no farewell but one loving look, one little sigh.

own. Ah me! Such heavy days, such long, long nights, such aching hearts, when those who loved her best were forced to see the thin hands stretched out to them, to hear the bitter cry, "Help me, help me!" and to feel that there was no help.

Jo never left her for an hour since Beth had said, "I feel stronger when you are here." She slept on a couch in the room, waking often to renew the fire, to feed, lift, or wait upon the patient creature who seldom asked for anything.

So the spring days came and went, the sky grew clearer and the earth greener, the flowers were up fair and early, and the birds came back in time to say good-bye to Beth, who, like a tired but trustful child, clung to the hands that had led her all her life.

As Beth had hoped, death came easily, and in the dark hour before the dawn, lying on her mother's bosom, she quietly drew her last breath, with no farewell but one loving look, one little sigh.

The sad news met Amy at Vevey in Switzerland. She bore the news well and quietly submitted to the family orders that she should not shorten her visit, for since it was too late to say good-bye to Beth, she had better stay and let absence soften her sorrow. But her heart was very heavy; she longed to be at home and every day looked across the lake, waiting for Laurie to come and comfort her.

He did come very soon; for the same mail brought letters to them both, but he was in Germany, and it took some days to reach him. The moment he read it, he packed his knapsack and was off to keep his promise to Amy.



When he arrived, Amy ran to him, exclaiming, "O Laurie, Laurie, I knew you'd come to me!"

When he arrived, Amy ran to him, exclaiming, "O Laurie, Laurie, I knew you'd come to me!"

Everything was said and settled then, for as they stood together, quite silent for a moment, Amy felt that no one could comfort and sustain her so well as Laurie, and Laurie decided that Amy was the only woman in the world who could fill Jo's place and make him happy.

Over the next several days, in spite of the new sorrow, it was a very happy time, so happy that it took Laurie a little while to recover from his surprise at the rapid cure of his first, and, as he had believed, last and only love. However, he soon had the conviction that it would have been impossible to love any other woman but Amy.

When Amy and Laurie wrote of their engagement, Mrs. March feared that Jo would find it difficult to rejoice, but her fears were soon set at rest; for, though Jo looked grave at first, she took it very quietly, and was full of hopes and plans for "the children."

"I am glad Amy has learned to love him," said Jo.

Laurie and Amy returned home from Europe as husband and wife, arriving the day before Jo's birthday. A sudden sense of loneliness came over Jo, in spite of her family's celebrating the day with her. But then there came a knock at the porch door.

She opened it and started as if a ghost had come to surprise her, for there stood a tall, bearded gentleman, beaming on her from the darkness.

"O, Mr. Bhaer, I am so glad to see you!"

"And I to see Miss March—but no, you haf a party—" and the Professor paused as the sound of voices and the tap of dancing feet came down to them.

"No, we haven't, only the family. My sister and friends have just come home, and we are all very happy. Come in, make one of us."

"If I shall not be Mister Too-Many, I will so gladly see them all. You haf been ill, my friend?"

"Not ill, but sad. We have had trouble since I saw you last."

"Ah, yes, I know. My heart was sore for you when I heard that!"

When she brought him upstairs, she announced, "Father, Mother, this is my friend, Professor Bhaer."

He received a very kind welcome, and they liked him right away. By the end of the evening, even Laurie thought him the most delightful old fellow he had ever met.

"Please remember, sir," said Laurie to him, "that there is always a welcome waiting for you next door."

For two weeks, the Professor came and went with loverlike regularity; then he stayed away for three whole days, and made no sign—which caused everybody to look serious, and Jo to become thoughtful, at first, and then—alas—very cross.

"Disgusted, I dare say," said Jo to herself. "It's nothing to me, of course; but I should think he would have come and bid us good-bye like a gentleman," she said to herself, as she put on her things for the customary walk one dull afternoon.

"You'd better take the umbrella, dear. It looks like rain," said her mother.

"Yes, Marmee, do you want anything in town? I've got to run and get some paper."

Mrs. March gave her a list of several items and said, "If you happen to meet Mr. Bhaer, bring him home to tea. I quite long to see the dear man."

While she was in the town, it started to rain—and Jo found she had forgotten the umbrella. With packages in her arms, she rushed across one street, narrowly escaping being run over by a cart; in doing so, she stumbled into Mr. Bhaer.

"Who is this strong-minded lady who goes so bravely under many horse noses, and so fast through much mud?" he teased her. Then he noticed how wet she was, and said, "You haf no umbrella. May I go with you, and take for you the bundles?"

"Yes, thank you."

She found herself walking arm in arm with her professor, his umbrella over her, but feeling as if the sun had suddenly burst out, that the world was all right again.

"We thought you had gone," said Jo.

"Did you believe that I should go with no farewell to those who haf been so heavenly kind to me?" he asked.

"No, I didn't; I knew you were busy about your business, but we rather missed you—Father and Mother especially."

"And you?"

"I'm always glad to see you, sir."



"Father, Mother, this is my friend, Professor Bhaer."

"I thank you, and come one time more before I go. I haf no longer business here; it is done. My friends find for me a place in a college, where I teach."

"How splendid!"

"Yes, but this place is at the West."

"So far away!"

"Miss March, I haf a great favor to ask of you," began the Professor.

"Yes, sir."

"I am bold to say it in spite of the rain, because so short a time remains to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Heart's dearest, why do you cry?"

"Because you are going away!"

"Ach, mein Gott, that is so good!" cried Mr. Bhaer. "Jo, I haf nothing but much love to gif you. I came to see if you could care for it, and I waited to be sure that I was something more than a friend. Am I? Can you make a little place in your heart for old Fritz?"

"Oh, yes!" said Jo.

The Professor looked as if he had conquered a kingdom, while Jo trudged beside him in the rain, feeling as if her place had always been there.

"What made you stay away so long?" she asked.

"It was not easy, but I could not find the heart to take you from that so happy home until I could haf a prospect of one to gif you, after much time, perhaps, and hard work. How could I ask you to gif up so much for a poor old fellow, who has no fortune but a little learning?"

"I'm glad you are poor. I couldn't bear a rich husband," said Jo. "And don't call yourself old—forty is the prime of life." She kissed her Fritz under the umbrella.

Then, turning from the night and storm and loneliness to the household light and warmth and peace awaiting them, with a glad "Welcome home!" Jo led her lover in and shut the door.

For a year Jo and her Professor worked and waited, hoped and loved, met occasionally, and wrote many letters. The second year began, and Aunt March died suddenly. But when their first sorrow was over—for they loved the old lady in spite of her sharp tongue—they found she had left Plumfield, with its immense house, lavish garden, and fruitful orchards, to Jo, which made all sorts of joyful things possible.

Jo announced, "I want to open a school there, a school for little lads—a happy, homelike school, with me to take care of them, and Fritz to teach them! Now, thanks to my good old aunt, we can live at Plumfield perfectly well, if we have a school. It's just the place for boys."

It was a very astonishing year altogether, for things seemed to happen in an unusually rapid and delightful manner. Almost before she knew where she was, Jo found herself married and settled at Plumfield. Then a family of six or seven boys sprung up like mushrooms. It never was a fashionable school, and the Professor did not get rich; but it was just what Jo intended it to be, and as the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness—Rob and Teddy.



"Can you make a little place in your heart for old Fritz?"

There were a great many holidays at Plumfield, and one of the most delightful was the yearly apple picking. Five years after Jo's wedding, one of these fruitful festivals occurred. Everybody was there; everybody laughed and sang; and everyone surrendered to the simple pleasures of the hour.

Jo and Meg set forth the supper on the grass, for an out-of-door tea was always the crowning joy of the day. The land literally flowed with milk and honey on such occasions.

When no one could eat any more, the boys dispersed for a final lark, leaving Mrs. March and her daughters to themselves. Each spoke then of her present happiness, and all agreed how beautifully their wishes had been gratified, even if in ways that they had never foreseen.

"Everyone can see that I'm far happier than I deserve," said Jo. "I have nothing to complain of and never was so jolly in my life."

"Yes, Jo, I think your harvest will be a good one," began Mrs. March.

"Not half so good as yours, Mother. Here it is, and we never can thank you enough for the patient sowing and reaping you have done," cried Jo.

"I hope there will be more wheat and fewer weeds every year," said Amy softly.

Mrs. March could only stretch out her arms, as if to gather children and grandchildren to herself, and say, "Oh, my girls, however long you may live, I never can wish you a greater happiness than this!"







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